

Will Ashenmacher, *Pioneer Press*

On a painful anniversary, Joe Bergeron's family and friends dedicate a memorial to the police sergeant and others killed in the line of duty.

The memorial commemorating slain Maplewood police Sgt. Joe Bergeron began as an idea drawn on a napkin.

Then, Maplewood Police Chief David Thomalla said, it took shape in sketches, which were followed by more formal designs. With the help of volunteer labor, donated supplies and a massive community fundraiser, it became reality Sunday, when Bergeron's widow and daughters removed the blue wrappings surrounding "Call of Duty" before a crowd of about 100 at Maplewood City Hall.

Community support for the landmark seemed a fitting tribute to Bergeron, who was killed a year ago Sunday while assisting in the investigation of an armed carjacking. Many of the ceremony's speakers praised Bergeron as a warm and generous contributor to his neighborhood.

Bergeron, 49, was driving along the Bruce Vento Trail in St. Paul searching for the carjacking suspects when the two men ambushed him.

The man who shot Bergeron, 21-year-old Jason John Jones, was shot and killed hours later when he attacked a St. Paul police officer. The second suspect, Joshua M. Martin, also 21, was sentenced to 35 years in prison for aiding and abetting Jones.

Even with many donated materials and free labor, the memorial — an officer kneeling in reflection in front of a plaque bearing Bergeron's likeness — cost about \$100,000. Bergeron's co-workers, family and friends have raised roughly the same amount through fundraising efforts. When it was unveiled Sunday, the tribute brought tears to Gail Bergeron's eyes.

"It's beautiful," she said. "It's amazing. I guess that's really the only way to describe it."

The 40-minute ceremony began on a solemn note.

"I wish none of us were here on this occasion," Thomalla said "We've lost a friend, a co-worker, a son-in-law, a brother and a husband."

But speaker after speaker praised the contributions Bergeron made to the Maplewood area.

"He was a leader, a co-worker and a friend within the department," said Maplewood Mayor Will Rossbach. "In the past year since his death, it's become obvious that Joe was a person many of us are trying to become."

In her speech, U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum praised Maplewood for rallying around the cause of the memorial, saying it was the kind of community initiative that she has seen people in other countries try to emulate.

After the ceremony, a few visitors placed single red roses by the statue.

"An important part of the healing process is ensuring that Joe Bergeron's life had meaning," Rossbach said. "We need to take the lessons he taught us ... and apply them to our own lives. This memorial will stand from this day forward to remind us of all the things Joe taught us. It will help make all of us better people by helping make all of us more like Joe."